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PSDAG Learning Series

Gender and Social Inclusion

Photo: Will Boase for RTI International

The Rwanda Private Sector Driven Agricultural Growth program (PSDAG) is a five-year (2014-2019) USAID-funded effort. The goal of PSDAG is to increase smallholder farmer incomes by promoting private sector investments – internationally and domestically – that contribute to the Government of Rwanda’s Vision 2020 aim of transforming agriculture into a market-oriented, competitive, and high-value sector.

Currently in its fifth year of implementation, and in order to ensure a smooth transition of project activities to partners, PSDAG is holding a series of **learning events** aimed at **sharing successes, lessons learned, tools and templates, and curricula** with a comprehensive group of public, private, and donor stakeholders within the Rwandan agriculture sector.

Agriculture is a main source of employment, income, and nutrition for women, youth, and persons with disabilities (PWD) in Rwanda. Despite these groups’ prevalence in Rwandan agriculture, issues such as lack of control over land, lack of access to credit, and an inability to ascend to leadership positions within families, cooperatives, associations, and other entities remain barriers to their equitable and profitable engagement in the sector. PSDAG interventions endeavored to ameliorate those constraints and capitalize on women, youth, and PWD-specific opportunities through a number of independent but mutually reinforcing Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) activities.

In December 2018, key stakeholders met in Kigali, Rwanda, to discuss PSDAG’s approach to increasing gender, youth, and PWD inclusion, its challenges, and its results. Major lessons learned are outlined in this learning brief.

LESSON 1

Competitive calls for grants or assistance should minimize complicated application processes and strict eligibility criteria and be designed according to the resources and capacities of marginalized groups.

LESSON 2

Emphasize the business case for gender, youth, and PWD inclusion alongside the social impact to incentivize broad and sustainable inclusion within private sector supply chains and employment.

LESSON 3

Disadvantaged groups often struggle to wean themselves from donor, government, and NGO subsidy over time; business development services should be provided to assist in sustainable business planning.

LESSON 4

Disaggregate beyond gender to systematically capture USAID project impact on youth and persons with disabilities or other marginalized target groups; without such disaggregation, reporting is anecdotal.

GESI Program Goals

The PSDAG project mandate was to transform agriculture into a market-oriented, competitive, and high-value sector. The goal of PSDAG's Gender and Social Inclusion approach was to ensure that the economic benefits of project activities accrued equitably across traditionally marginalized groups within Rwandan society.

GESI Activities and Process

PSDAG's Gender and Social Inclusion approach consisted of independent but mutually reinforcing GESI mainstreaming and GESI-specific interventions in order to promote the inclusion of gender, youth, and PWD within the broader agriculture sector.

GESI mainstreaming:

- Potential SME partners applying for co-investment through PSDAG's Value Chain Competitiveness Fund (VCCF) were awarded bonus points for incorporation of gender, youth, or PWD in their business plans, and upon award were required to set and track targets for inclusion. SMEs received training and coaching to mainstream GESI principles into business models and operational documents (e.g., HR policies).
- PSDAG's cooperative professionalization efforts provided BDS/QMS to agricultural cooperatives. GESI principles were incorporated into all training materials and internal operations documents, which included the promotion of youth and women into cooperative leadership.
- PSDAG facilitated the creation of national and local Agri Public-Private Dialogue (PPD) processes which actively incorporate women, youth, and PWD participants, as well as their unique challenges, into dialogues and resolutions.

GESI-specific interventions:

- PSDAG released VCCF solicitations targeted specifically at women, youth, and PWD-owned businesses, cooperatives, and entrepreneurs. In recognition of additional financial and capacity barriers these groups face, PSDAG simplified the application process and lowered the co-investment requirements to facilitate access to funding and technical assistance by marginalized groups.
- PSDAG developed a GESI curriculum, and trained and coached more than 27 SMEs to develop and embed social inclusion strategies in their business models.
- In collaboration with MINAGRI/RYAF/CDE, PSDAG inaugurated a year-long internship program that placed youth in agri-SMEs and cooperatives. The internships build youth's professional resumes while also proving to SMEs that local youth possess sought-after skills in agronomy, finance, marketing, and technology.

Results

PSDAG interventions helped over 100,000 women adopt improved technologies and practices, resulting in US\$12 million in increased income; more than 5,000 people were trained to advance gender equality and female empowerment outcomes; and within the PPD process, 42 percent of participants were women who agreed that the PPD process was inclusive. For youth, the internship program has placed 263 youth (193 women) at SMEs and cooperatives around the country, with PSDAG partners reporting that they plan to hire many of them full-time and continue using the internship program mechanism as an employee training and pipeline tool. While youth and PWD results were not included in the project's monitoring framework, anecdotal evidence indicates that PSDAG partners have a higher-than-usual rate of inclusion for those groups.

Selected key lessons learned based on challenges that arose during implementation are highlighted at left; a more comprehensive list was shared with stakeholders at the December learning event.